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ABSTRACT

This report, based on the materials used by the Committee on Irish Langauge Attitudes Research, describes the relations between language policy and socioeconomic development in the Republic of Ireland. Their contribution to central state planning in the maintenance and extension of Irish since attainment of political independence in 1922 is discussed. Topics discussed include community maintenance of language in Irish speaking areas, generating ability in Irish through the education system, education, and the relationship between Irish and social mobility. (Author/JB)

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LANGUAGE POLICY AND SOCIOECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN IRELAND

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FL 010 849

Hilary Tovey

INSTITIÚID TEANGEOLAÍOCHTA ÉIREANN

(LINGUISTICS INSTITUTE OF IRELAND)

LANGUAGE POLICY AND SOCIOECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN IRELAND

An edited version of a paper read by the author at the Ninth Congress of Sociology (Sociolinguistic Program, Section VII) *in Uppsala during August, 1978.*

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INTRODUCTION

The COMMITTEE ON IRISH LANGUAGE ATTITUDES RESEARCH (C.L.A.R.) was set up in September, 1970 by Mr. George Colley T.D., then Minister for Finance and the Gaeltacht in the Irish Government. The Committee was asked to report on current attitudes towards the Irish language and its restoration and on the extent to which the public would support developments aimed at such restoration. The Committee's wide-ranging researches began in January, 1972 and it submitted a Report to the Minister in October, 1975. The Committee then went out of existence, but its extensive documentation was taken in charge by Institiúid Teangeolaíochta Éireann, in whose premises the Committee had been accommodated.

As part of its policy to make further use of the C.L.A.R. documentation, Institiúid Teangeolaíochta Éireann appointed Hilary Tovey in September, 1976 to carry out further studies in regard to knowledge and use of, and attitudes to, Irish. Hilary Tovey had been previously lecturing in the Department of Social Theory and Institutions in University College, Cork, and had also been working in association with Professor Damian Hannan of that faculty on the C.L.A.R. materials. She worked on a full-time basis in the Institiúid until October, 1977 when she took up a post as lecturer in Trinity College, Dublin, since when she has continued to work in a part-time and directive capacity in the Institiúid.

The present paper arises mainly from her extended studies of the C.L.A.R. materials and is an edited version of a paper read by her at the Ninth World Congress of Sociology in Uppsala in August, 1978.

Tomás Ó Domhnalláin

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Director,
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LANGUAGE POLICY AND SOCIOECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN IRELAND[1]

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the years since its inception, the Irish language revival movement has been so integral a strand in the texture of Irish culture and politics, so prolific in the organisations, plans and projects it has stimulated, and so copiously characterised, reported on and debated in print, that it has been impossible for me, in this already over-long paper, to do more than touch on limited aspects of it. I have tried to focus on those aspects of the situation of Irish which are most relevant in considering the relations between language policy and socioeconomic development, and which have also been most central to the formation of state policy on the language. In fact, the paper discusses only two areas of state policy, and draws on existing data on the state of the language to develop some limited conclusions in regard to these. The areas discussed are, first, the Gaeltacht, where I argue, language maintenance has been interpreted, in policy terms, as the problem of maintaining local rural communities, and that this conflation of the welfare of the language with the welfare of the community of users has led to a neglect of the consequences of socioeconomic development within Gaeltacht areas for linguistic conservation; and second, within the national society, where the revival of Irish has meant to state policy-makers the generation of ability in Irish, the use of the state education system as a vehicle for language promotion – a policy which, with all its disadvantages, has had some crucial effects in linking the languages with educational certification during a period of rapid change in the occupational structure and in patterns of recruitment into expanding occupational sectors.

A brief mention of some relevant effects of socioeconomic development in Ireland may serve as an introduction. The society which achieved political independence in 1922 was a predominantly rural one, with over half the working population employed in agriculture, and the majority of these in subsistence farming. By 1971 the proportion employed in industry had increased from around 14% to nearly one-third, while the agricultural sector now accounted for about one quarter. The most marked changes occurred from the 1960s on, following a change in economic policy from one of free trade based largely on agricultural exports to one of dependent industrialisation through attracting foreign investment and the subsidiaries of foreign or multi-national firms into Ireland. In occupational terms, the change meant extensive upward mobility, mainly structural in nature[2]: between 1961 and 1971 a major growth occurred in managerial and administrative positions in the commercial and industrial sector, in professional and skilled manual work, and amongst salaried employees, while the agricultural sector and semi-skilled workers declined. In line with these developments, the rate of emigration dropped, the total population increased for the first time since before 1851, participation in education, particularly at post-primary and third level, increased extensively, and there was increasing movement from the country into metropolitan and urban centres. Some other characteristics of a "modernising" society are also becoming apparent: an increasing marriage rate, a younger age at marriage and a decline in family size; a growing participation of married women in the work force; a consumer-oriented middle class. Yet other aspects — secularism, class consciousness, universalism – which one might expect to follow are not yet so easily discerned.

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There does not yet appear to have been a serious erosion of the traditional allegiances to religion and to nationalism, although their meanings are being redefined. In spite of a growing gap between rich and poor, Irish society is still status- rather than class-conscious, and social relationships still tend to be personalised[3]. This complex of factors is affecting the current situation of the Irish language in ways which I hope will emerge in this paper, and the possibility that some of them are transitional aspects of the stage of development reached by the society must be borne in mind in assessing the future of the language.

2. LANGUAGE AND LANGUAGE POLICY IN IRELAND

The Irish language was once the main medium of communication used throughout the whole island, and had a well-developed written form and literary style. Its displacement by English is usually dated from the beginning of the 17th century, the result of a number of historical factors[4]. Years of English colonial rule transformed the language into a symbol of all that was poor and backward in Irish society, contributing to a situation where native Irish-speaking parents voluntarily tried to raise their children as English speakers in the hope that this would lead them to a better life. This image of the language as a peasant medium, part of the lifestyle of those living in the poorest and most traditional rural areas, persists today among some sections of the population, and the belief that as a language it is naturally unfit to be the medium of communication of a modern, progressive, technologically-based society is one constraining element in the complex of attitudes to Irish within whose framework the revival movement has had to manoeuvre. On the other hand, the close connections between the revival of interest in the language towards the end of the 19th century, fostered by the Gaelic League, and the independence movement which eventually led to the establishment of the Free State in 1922, ensured a firm position for the language in the national identity symbolic system. On this basis there appears to be strong support for the continued visibility of the language and for policies directed to this amongst some two-thirds of the population today[5].

Table 1 (over) gives an overview of trends in the maintenance of Irish over the last century, based on census returns. In spite of limitations[6], it allows us to examine both the language situation obtaining at the time when the first official language policies were laid down by the new national governments, and the impact of such policies on the current linguistic situation as measured by the latest census returns. In 1851 the distribution of Irish speakers across the country was highly uneven -- while the counties in the province of Leinster show almost uniformly low proportions, in some counties of Munster and Connaught, particularly those along the southern and western seaboard, up to 60% of the population was recorded as able to speak Irish. By 1926 there was already some diminution in regional differences — a significant increase of Irish-speaking ability amongst previously almost monolingual English areas, but a decline in all the areas except Donegal which had previously returned very high rates. What was clear even then, and has become clearer with each succeeding census to those concerned with the revival of Irish, is that different types of linguistic ability are being reported from these different areas: the increase in areas which previously reported very low rates has been due primarily to a growth of secondary bilingualism, where ability in Irish was acquired through learning it in school or, in earlier years, in the Irish

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Table 1

Irish speakers as a percentage of the population of Ireland by province and county, as reported in the census

	1851	1926	1961	1971
Leinster	3.5%	8.8%	22.2%	24.5%
Munster	43.9	20.4	28.7	30.6
Connaught	50.8	31.7	37.6	37.2
Ulster	17.0	22.9	31.4	29.5
Carlow	0.4	9.4	23.1	23.1
Dublin	0.9	8.4	21.1	24.5
Kildare	0.5	10.0	25.6	26.8
Kilkenny	13.5	10.4	25.4	25.3
Laois	0.2	10.0	25.4	26.8
Longford	1.8	10.3	25.4	24.6
Louth	18.0	10.7	22.1	23.6
Meath	6.4	9.7	24.2	24.8
Offaly	0.4	9.6	22.4	24.8
Westmeath	0.8	19.8	24.7	28.2
Wexford	0.4	8.0	21.1	21.5
Wicklow	0.1	8.7	19.6	20.3
Clare	59.5	30.3	31.2	32.8
Cork	52.5	20.1	27.7	29.8
Kerry	61.5	33.0	35.4	35.5
Limerick	37.4	13.7	26.2	29.1
Tipperary NR	4.2	10.5	26.7	31.6
Tipperary SR	30.7	12.3	26.9	38.3
Waterford	62.6	20.4	27.7	28.9
Galway	69.1	47.6	47.3	45.3
Leitrim	13.4	10.8	26.0	26.3
Mayo	65.8	36.8	38.5	36.5
Roscommon	26.7	15.5	26.4	29.9
Sligo	38.3	17.5	28.3	28.6
Cavan	7.5	10.7	22.3	23.0
Donegal	28.1	54.5	38.6	35.1
Monaghan	7.7	11.3	24.7	23.8
Ireland (26 Counties)	29.1	18.3	27.2	28.3
Ireland (26 Counties) Population	5,112,000	2,972,000	2,818,000	2,978,000

Source: CLAR Report, 1976, Ch. III, "Ability", p. 110.

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classes organised on a national basis by the Gaelic League. It may also reflect a reversal of attitudes to the language which this helped to bring about. But the decline in those areas where previously high levels were reported indicates a decline in the proportion of monolingual Irish speakers and primary bilinguals in the population, that is, a decline in the community usage of Irish as compared with an increase in individual abilities in Irish in the rest of the country.

This distinction is reflected in the two-pronged policy which has dominated language planning in Ireland since the foundation of the state; on the one hand, to conserve and maintain the use of Irish in those parts of the country which still possessed communities of native Irish speakers; and on the other hand, to develop a level of abilities in Irish in the rest of the population which would eventually result in the extension of use to the whole society. A preliminary indication of the extent to which these policies have been successful is found in the returns for 1961 and 1971: while the overall proportion of the 26 Counties population reported as able to speak Irish in 1971 has been restored almost to the same level as in 1851, the shift from primary to secondary bilingualism appears to have continued.

3. THE GAELTACHT AREAS: COMMUNITY MAINTENANCE OF LANGUAGE

The notion of a Gaeltacht area embodies a conception of language use and language maintenance as involving the persistence of a geographically bounded local community – an idea which has dominated revival thinking from the Gaelic League to the present day, in the national context as well as in the Gaeltacht[7]. However, official designations of the geographical areas concerned have never coincided exactly with the linguistic communities of Irish users, and over time they have had to be revised to take account of the shrinking population of these communities[8]. Under the most recent revision, the 1967 Gaeltacht Areas Order, the areas so designated included parts of seven counties – Cork, Donegal, Galway, Kerry, Mayo, Meath and Waterford; and according to the 1971 Census they contained then some 70,000 people, or about 2.4% of the total population of the Republic. In the previous five years this had declined by over 3,000 people, a drop of about 4.3%; even greater declines are evident in earlier inter-censal periods.

Not all of those who live in Gaeltacht areas reported themselves in the 1971 Census as able to speak Irish: some 55.5 thousand did so, i.e. about 80% of Gaeltacht residents but less than 2% of the national population. Individual Gaeltacht areas are also quite dissimilar in size, and in the strength of their Irish-using component: in 1971 their populations ranged from over 20,000 in Donegal and Galway to tiny clusters of some 800 people in Meath and Waterford, while the proportion reported as able to speak Irish varied from around 90% in Cork and Waterford to 73% in Mayo and only 58% in Meath.

It is, of course, no accident that those areas which retained the highest levels of Irish use during a period of general shift to English were also among the most isolated and underdeveloped areas of the country. From their establishment until quite recently, Gaeltacht areas have shared with other depressed rural areas in Ireland the characteristics of an ageing population, a low marriage rate with a low birth rate as a result, and a high rate of emigration amongst young people[9] which indicate a disintegrating rural community life[10]. Gaeltacht areas have been affected not only by language policies, but also by policies towards such areas generally, or perhaps we should say by the lack of them. The nineteenth century land war to secure the rights of tenant farmers, the ideological and political ruralisation of the early years of

independence[11] and the idealisation of the small farmer way of life in the following decades combined to produce until very recently a policy of containment rather than development for the small-holding rural sector, even though it was increasingly apparent that it could no longer maintain a thriving population. The policy combined a tacit acceptance of high population loss from the land with the provision of some measure of relief for the residual population.

As the rural way of life became an ideal for Irish society, the Gaeltacht became doubly idealised as the heartland of Irish national and cultural identity, and official recognition of its linguistic distinctiveness tended to merge with a desire to retain a whole traditional way of life[12]. Thus state policy towards the Gaeltacht differed from its policies for depressed rural areas in general mainly in the greater degree of commitment to maintenance of these communities which was translated into financial support. A special government department, Roinn na Gaeltachta, was set up to deal with its affairs, but as might be expected this department, which was headed by its own Minister for the Gaeltacht for the first time only in 1973, has interpreted its responsibilities mainly in terms of the channelling of financial aid to specific areas in response to local initiative[13], while adopting a laissez-faire attitude towards socioeconomic development and its effects on the linguistic situation. Not unnaturally, extra financial aid of this sort has resulted in some suspicion and jealousy towards Gaeltacht communities, particularly in neighbouring and also depressed rural areas, which is often expressed in very hostile attitudes towards the Irish language and its users, and the fact that while the use of the language continues to decline, the standard of living in Gaeltacht areas is now estimated to be significantly higher than that of neighbouring and similar but non-Gaeltacht areas as a result of such aid, has given their case some weight.

In the last decade, with the change in policy for the national economy, Gaeltacht areas have also experienced some limited industrial development. The semi-state agency Gaeltarra Éireann, which has responsibility for the Gaeltacht, was one of the first examples of the attempt to locate industrial concerns in underdeveloped rural areas where little alternative employment exists outside farming and emigration rates are high. In the absence of more recent demographic data than the 1971 Census, it is difficult to assess the impact of this on the local demographic situation, but while it has been estimated that up to the late 1950s as much as two-thirds of each age cohort migrated from Gaeltacht areas, this has probably now reduced considerably, and between the provision of new employment opportunities for local young people, and the introduction of new residents into the area in the wake of development, there may even be a population increase recorded in the next census for some at least of the Gaeltachtaí.

However, the relative prosperity now enjoyed by Gaeltacht areas may have come too late to halt the continuing decline of the Irish language. For more detailed information on the language situation in the Gaeltachtaí than census data can provide, we may turn to the findings of the CLAR[14] research team, which allow us to distinguish between ability in and use of the language, and to make some estimate of the reasons for variation and of likely future trends.

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Table 2

Speaking ability in Irish by Gaeltacht area

Gaeltacht area	No Irish	Odd word only	Few simple sentences	Parts of conversations	Most conversations	Native speaker	No.
Cork	10.0%	10.0%	10.0%	5.0%	15.0%	50.0%	20
Donegal	3.1	3.1	3.7	3.7	9.3	77.2	162
Galway	0.6	2.8	6.1	12.2	9.4	68.0	181
Kerry	3.4	5.1	1.7	16.9	11.9	61.0	59
Mayo	6.9	24.8	11.9	14.9	9.9	31.7	101
Waterford	-	5.3	-	10.5	21.1	63.2	19
TOTAL	2.4	3.6	4.7	9.2	10.0	69.7	542

Source: CLAR Report, 1976, Ch. III, "Ability", p.138

The CLAR findings reproduce the 1971 Census pattern of variation between Gaeltachtaí in the extent of ability in Irish of their inhabitants, and also point to considerable variation between inhabitants in particular Gaeltacht areas. Three main factors emerge to explain the variation between individuals. Ability is lower amongst those who have migrated into Gaeltacht areas (primarily through in-marriage, but also for occupational reasons): while nearly 80% of respondents born in the Gaeltacht rated their ability at the two highest levels offered, this was true of only 40% of in-migrants. But the two most important influences on ability are the amount of Irish used in the parental home of the respondent, and the amount of Irish in the primary school programme to which he was exposed.

Since ability in Irish in the Gaeltacht is still acquired primarily through the childhood home, it is disturbing that there appears to be a pattern of declining usage over the life-cycle of individuals which suggests that the home will not be such a strong source of primary bilingualism for future generations of Gaeltacht children. Less than three-quarters of those

Table 3

Use of Irish by Gaeltacht respondents in a number of contexts

Context of use	Frequency of Use			No.
	Always/ often	Occasionally/ seldom	Never	
Childhood home	66.6%	22.0	10.7	542
Current home	57.5%	29.2	12.5	542
Current work	44.7%	25.0	20.0	294
	Used	Not used		
During primary school years	77.3%	22.7		536
During p.p. school years	60.0%	40.0		122

Source: TOVEY, 1977, p.17, based on CLAR Report, passim.

respondents who came from homes where Irish was used "always" or "often" have maintained this level of usage in their current homes. While the trend is offset to a very limited degree by the introduction of new users at a later stage of the life-cycle than the childhood home – some 14% of those who "never" heard Irish used in their childhood home report its use "always" or "often" in their current home – its effects are revealed in the relationship of ability to age among Gaeltacht respondents. Although some 80% of those in the age groups 45-54, 55-64 and 65 years and above, rated themselves as having "most conversational" ability or higher, only 60% of 30-34 year olds and 58% of 20-24 year olds did so.

Although it has been claimed that "in regard to the small areas in which Irish remains the spoken language, all teaching and communication in (primary) schools is in the Irish language, the English language being taught only as a subject" (Ó DOMHNALLÁIN, 1977, p. 88), the CLAR survey revealed that less than half of the Gaeltacht sample of respondents had attended all-Irish primary schools. This is clearly affected by the presence in the sample of people born and reared outside the Gaeltacht, but even if they are excluded, only about 57% of native Gaeltacht respondents had attended such schools. While some respondents would have received their schooling before the introduction of Irish-medium teaching after the foundation of the state, for the rest it seems highly likely that the Department of Education's policy of closing down small primary schools in areas with declining populations, combined with inadequate provision for transport to alternative schools in the Gaeltacht, has been a major factor in creating a situation where children from officially defined Gaeltacht areas received a primary education in English in schools outside Gaeltacht boundaries.

The situation in regard to post-primary education, where even that degree of protection afforded by a state policy of providing Irish-medium schools in Irish-speaking areas did not obtain, was considerably worse. In the CLAR sample, over three-quarters of the respondents had not gone beyond a primary school level, although it should be remembered that we are dealing here with a residual population, and that the acquisition of a post-primary education would be a major factor in promoting migration out of the area. Of those who did attend a post-primary school, only a minority received their education through Irish. The close relationship between the medium of the school and language use by pupils is evident in the fact that while over 90% of those at all-Irish primary or post-primary schools said that they used Irish outside class during those years, the proportion drops to around 50% for those at English-medium schools.

The lack of complementarity in language medium between Gaeltacht homes and school experiences is significant in revealing the extent to which the educational institutions, themselves a central element in the state policy for the revival of Irish outside Gaeltachtaí, have operated within Gaeltacht areas as an anglicising influence. The CLAR team argued that "educational institutions", along with

> "local authorities, regional or semi-state bodies and the arms of central government such as police and social services in the Gaeltacht .... are often localised peripheral parts of larger systems, the total clientele of which are predominantly English-speaking. The agencies operating in the Gaeltacht are staffed

largely by English monolinguals, and the use of English is usual in both the activities of personnel in the local setting and the relationships between the local agencies and their central administration. The local authorities particularly, but also the central administrations, have no clear knowledge of the linguistic implications of their activities nor have they any structured means by which such knowledge can be acquired and brought into consideration in their operations". (CLAR Report, Chapter V, p. 352).

Development in the Gaeltacht has meant primarily the extension of state administration and centralised bureaucracies into rural local communities, and this has been a predominantly anglicising force. But the effects of such administrative penetration also depend upon the linguistic situation in the communities themselves. The CLAR team studied community patterns of Irish usage in the Gaeltacht in two different ways – the first being a re-analysis of the survey data collected, in terms of domains or situational contexts of use, and the second a network analysis of language use based on extensive interviews with twenty informants, four from each of five selected Gaeltacht communities. The first technique[15], which grouped respondents by residence in a District Electoral Division (which as the smallest officially recognised geographical unit was taken to approximate to a local community), allowed

Table 4

Typology of Gaeltacht DEDs, by Irish usage and potential for usage

Setting	High Potential		Mid Potential				Low Potential
Home	X	X	X	X	X	O	O
Informal	X	X	X	X	O	O	O
Symbolic	X	X	X	O	O	O	O
Distant	X	O	O	O	O	O	O
Total DEDs	8	1	5	1	2	2	4
Scale Type	I	II	II	III	IV	V	V

X = over 75% of respondents reporting Irish used "always" or "often" in all or most of the situations of usage examined in each general setting.

O = every other case.

Source: CLAR Report, 1976, Ch. IV, Part II, p. 242.

Gaeltacht communities to be ranked on a continuum of combined usage and potential for usage, which ranged from almost monolingual Irish-using communities of Type I (of which three are found in Donegal, 4 in Galway and

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one in Kerry) to the almost monolingual English-using communities of Type V (three of which are found in Galway and three in Mayo). From this it is evident that the erosion of Irish usage in Gaeltacht communities follows a fairly clear pattern: it is only in those DEDs where Irish is strongly entrenched as the dominant language of use in the home informal and symbolic contexts that it is likely to be used also in formal situations in which new events are involved, that is non-traditional contexts or persons for which no established associations exist in the local community. In the other 15 DEDs there has occurred "an orderly progression of language shift ... (which) moves from the introduction of English in the form of new contexts or 'neo-events' into progressively more traditional contexts" (ARGOFF, 1975, p. 65). To answer the further question whether those DEDs which are not monolingually either Irish- or English-using have evolved a stable bilingual situation which might be maintained for a considerable time in the future, or whether they are actually in a stage of transition to monolingual English-usage, we must look at levels of competence in Irish in the community: only where these are very high indeed (80-90% of respondents at the highest ability levels) will we find a high density of usage in the community, high levels of use by children with each other, and high levels of competence in Irish in the children. On this basis Argoff estimates that in some 10 of the 23 DEDs studied the use of Irish is being maintained, and is actually being increased in scope to cover new situations and events as these are introduced; in the others, a substantial shift to English has already occurred or is in progress, and will continue to penetrate into the most intimate domains of language use in these communities unless there is a change in the language policies of the "external" institutions responsible for the introduction of English.

The Gaeltacht network study added some interesting refinements to this argument, the main one being that although a domain analysis of Gaeltacht community usage patterns is enlightening, "the individual decisions in the Gaeltacht bilingual contexts are made ... foremost on the basis of personal factors .... it is the ego's cognitive mapping of his interlocutors in terms of language-usage habits, native language history, and preference-stances towards Irish that determines the language of the dyadic interactions, unless factors of context intervene" (Op. cit. p. 66). Perhaps the most important of these factors is native language history: "For a substantial amount of Irish usage to take place there must be a substantial number of persons in the local community whose childhood language experience was dominated by Irish" (Op. cit. p. 67). Argoff suggests that in Type II Gaeltachtaí, the largest proportion of the natively Irish-speaking population is in fact made up of native bilinguals, and such speakers neither rate themselves nor are rated by other members of their community as having the highest levels of ability in Irish, and they frequently use English in their interactions with each other. The maintenance of Irish usage in these DEDs therefore, would seem to depend crucially on the conversion of native bilingualism into native Irish dominance in the childhood home.

It seems then that only in something over a third of the communities in the officially defined Gaeltacht areas is the language strong enough to resist in future the anglicising forces which stem from socioeconomic development, whether in the form of penetration by local government and state administration, private economic interests or the increasing number of visitors who return to these areas year after year and even purchase second homes there. At the same time it is obvious that economic development of

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such areas continues to be a priority, if existing demographic trends are to be changed, community life revitalised, and a sense of pride and commitment to their cultural distinctiveness restored to Gaeltacht inhabitants. There is, in fact, some slight evidence that this is already occurring: Argoff points out that in the bilingual communities in the Gaeltacht, amongst the 16 year olds and younger, there has been a marked increase in both the use of Irish and in commitment to its use, even though there is a much higher proportion of native English-speakers in this age group than among the 16-24 year olds. Local respondents, themselves aware of the change, attributed it to the greater stability in population and availability of indigenous employment for young people, which, linked to a better education in Irish, they felt led to a greater interest and pride in the language. Gaeltacht residents have not been untouched either by the reawakening of linguistic and cultural minorities in other parts of Europe which has been such a remarkable feature of this decade. And the growth of self-awareness has also been helped by the establishment, in the early '70s, of Radio na Gaeltachta – a local branch of the state broadcasting authority which broadcasts in Irish for some three hours a day to the people of the Gaeltacht areas, and which has helped to break down traditional barriers between the different areas which lack of opportunities for contact and beliefs about the unintelligibility of the different regional dialects had previously maintained.

If the development of services and economic opportunities in Gaeltacht areas is to continue, however, without further reducing the use of Irish, Government policies on the Gaeltacht must be refined and clarified. The current identification of the welfare of the language with the welfare of the community of users is insufficient to safeguard the use of Irish from the collateral effects of ensuring the latter. Some recent government pronouncements suggest that current thinking on the Gaeltachtaí will increasingly focus on the problems these areas share with the underdeveloped rural regions of the south and west of Ireland generally, and that there may be a growing tendency to disregard the issue of linguistic distinctiveness. An example is the ambiguity in the intentions of the central broadcasting authority in regard to Radio na Gaeltachta, which they have occasionally characterised as "an experiment in local radio", rather than as the provision of a special service to a linguistically distinct group; the implication is that it should be turned into a genuinely local service, broadcasting to locality groups regardless of their pattern of language use.

If the linguistic distinctiveness of the Gaeltachtaí is the central reason for the existence of special policies towards them, this fact must be given greater recognition in the formulation of future policies. It has often been suggested that the anglicising agencies which would be most readily amenable to intervention on linguistic grounds are the local, state and semi-state administrations, and that one way of combatting their anglicising effect would be to give Gaeltacht people themselves much greater control over the local branches of these systems in their areas. The recently established Gaeltacht authority may be a step in this direction, although early signs are that it will not be given as much control as was hoped. The problem still remains, however, of control over private commercial ventures, whether the location of businesses in Gaeltacht areas, or the recent case of a project to house in the Galway Gaeltacht an overspill from Galway city, which would have meant the importation of a housing estate of English speakers into an Irish-using area. At present there is nothing in the rules governing the actions of

local county councils and regional planners which would force them to pay attention to the conservation of Irish usage as they must to any recognised local amenity: it has been suggested that if the presence of native Irish users in an area could be accorded some similar status this might be one way in which control could be brought to bear on the anglicising effects of penetration from the private commercial sector.

4. THE NATIONAL PROBLEM: GENERATING ABILITY IN IRISH

The precise destination envisaged for the revival movement in the national society has never been clarified[16], and the way that successive governments have interpreted it appears to have shifted over time, from the ideal of return to an "Irish-speaking Ireland" held out by de Valera in the 1930s, to the current support for developing some sort of bilingual society in which the use of Irish, however frequent, would not exclude the use of English[17]. With very few exceptions, moreover[18], state language planners in Ireland have not attempted to impose or regulate the use of Irish in any domain of social life. The compulsory acquisition of ability in the language was, and is still to some degree, imposed on all students in the state education system, apparently in the belief that the development of ability in school, and the maintenance of supportive attitudes towards the language among the general population, would in time lead naturally to a change in language usage[19].

State use of compulsion even in this limited way, in the education system, and in the imposition of ability in Irish as an occupational requirement for entry into civil service and local government posts and some professions (teaching, medicine, the law), could almost be seen as an aberration from the main stream of state support for the language, and one from which it now appears increasingly anxious to retrieve itself. The main stream, in the national society as in the Gaeltacht, has been the provision of financial aid to voluntary organisations, local bodies or individuals who were engaged in projects which could be regarded as contributing to the revival of Irish, and the initiative for which has come from outside the state administration[20]. The part played by voluntary effort in the revival movement has been a very crucial one, therefore; it is only in the last two years that the state administration has recognised some responsibility for initiating community language revival projects of this kind, by establishing Bord na Gaeilge as a semi-state body with the job of promoting the language in the national society.

A policy of using a state educational system to bring about a shift in language usage in a national society, particularly in the absence of complementary controls over contexts of use outside the school settings, has serious weaknesses which are becoming increasingly apparent in the Irish context. Central problems which Irish language policy-makers have generally been unwilling to confront arise over the possibility of translating secondary bilingual ability generated in a school context into use in other domains, and over the levels of ability which can be generated through conventional second-language teaching techniques within the constraints of a school curriculum. Both of these are touched on below. Nevertheless, in using the education system to compel the acquisition of ability in Irish, policy-makers were recognising a very simple but important fact — that lack of ability in a language presents the major barrier to the extension of its use. We have seen (Table 1) that between 1926 and 1971 the proportion of the population recorded

in the census as able to speak Irish increased from 18% to 28%; in Leinster alone this represented an increase from less than 10% to nearly one quarter of the population. This striking growth in the potential for use of the language is due to two main factors: the availability of access to ability in Irish provided by government policy on education, and the expansion of participation in post-primary education which occurred during the period. It is hard to avoid asking what might have been achieved by the policy of tying ability in the language to education, had this been accompanied by appropriate controls over domains of usage.

(i) Ability and Use

However, it must be recognised that the relationship between ability in and use of Irish is a very complex one. As the CLAR Report emphasises, other factors, particularly commitment or motivation, and opportunities for use, do intervene in the relationship. In general, the higher one's ability in the language, the greater one's commitment to use it; opportunity for use, on the other hand, depends on many factors – the context, the ability and attitude of others present, the topic – and not least, the way in which the situation is defined by the speaker himself. Interpersonal usage of Irish appears, in the national society, to be quite strictly governed by a set of social norms which have varying relationships with ability: the higher one's ability, the more likely one is to believe that it is impolite to use Irish in the presence of non-Irish speakers, while the lower one's ability, the more likely one is to wish to avoid initiating conversations in Irish or participating in them with people whose abilities are better. The effect is to limit the occasions on which it would be felt appropriate to use Irish to those situations where others involved are known, and are known to be at the same ability level as oneself.

Irish usage then is most likely to occur amongst already established networks of acquaintances whose levels of ability and commitment to the language are high. One of the by-products of state policy on the language has been to contribute to the formation of such networks: "Common school experience, school ties, higher educational attainments, high social status and other similar kinds of institutional involvements 'concentrate' these networks" (ibid). To take one example, if the selection of spouses was random relative to ability in Irish, the probability of a respondent with high levels of ability finding a spouse at around the same level would be around 2%, but in the CLAR sample about one in four of those at the highest levels was married to a spouse of the same standard[21].

The combination of all these factors – high ability, commitment, and the availability of definable opportunities – results in a rather complex pattern of use. In the CLAR study, some 3-4% of the national sample reported using Irish "frequently" in their current home or work situations, with a further 10-12% reporting "some" or 'occasional" use in these contexts; but some 14% reported having used it intensively over a considerable period at some stage in their life cycle, whether in the parental home, during school years, since leaving school, or now. Altogether about 27% of the sample reported at least occasional usage either currently or at an earlier stage of their lives. The Report concludes that "The majority of potential users appear to be unable to maintain usage primarily, it appears, because of the difficulty of maintaining old friendships, or building up new friendships in the language, as one passes through the various life stages from childhood to school, to work, to courtship, marriage and stable adult residence. Thus ... there is, in fact,

considerable mobility in and out of Irish using networks over a person's life-cycle" (op. cit. p. 308). The increase in social and geographical mobility which has accompanied socioeconomic development in Ireland, while it is a major cause in the formation of such networks, appears also to increase the difficulties of maintaining them, if we can again take ability levels between spouses as an indicator. While the likelihood that married respondents of high ability in Irish in the CLAR sample would have spouses of equal ability was high, it was very much lower than in the previous generation where over half of respondents' fathers who were reported to have high ability levels were married to spouses at a similar level.

Discontinuities in use over the lifetime, or the absence of opportunities for use, in turn affect the maintenance of ability levels. There appears to be a fairly considerable "slippage" in the levels of ability with which individuals leave school, during the subsequent years[22]. It is most pronounced amongst those who left with only medium levels of ability, but occurs also amongst those who left school with very high abilities, only half of whom have maintained this level over the period since. A state language policy which concentrates primarily on the generation of abilities, and leaves use more or less to look after itself, seems as likely to generate high levels of frustration as of usage; while intervention in the process of network establishment and maintenance, to increase available opportunities of use and to reduce the interpersonal constraints on these, may be a task more suited to local and voluntary revival groups than to the state, it is clearly necessary that the state provide a lead by broadening the scope of its policies to include concern for use as well as for ability.

(ii) <u>The generation of ability through the education system</u>

It must also be admitted that the success of state policy in creating ability itself appears, on CLAR evidence, to be rather less than the 28% reported "Irish speakers" in the 1971 Census would imply.

Table 5

Percentage distribution of national (excluding Gaeltacht) respondents by their level of communicative (conversational) competence in Irish

Level of competence	%
1. High verbal competence – sufficient for most conversational purposes	9
2. Adequate verbal competence – but some difficulty keeping pace with conversations, finding right words, using correct grammar etc.	7
3. High passive and [illegible] conversational competence – adequate for parts of conversation	13
4. Moderate passive but [illegible] conversational ability	15
5. No conversational ability and low passive ability – difficulty with pronunciation, words, grammar, making oneself understood etc.	34
6. No Irish	21
Number:	2,443

Source: CLAR Report, 1976, Ch. V, p.312

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A small minority of adults in the national population may have acquired ability in Irish in their childhood homes (probably about 0.5%), from private study, attendance at voluntary Irish classes, or visits to the Gaeltacht; but the vast majority owe what ability they possess to their experience in the state education system. Since only the highest levels of ability are translated into use with any frequency, we may estimate that at present only about one-tenth of the national population would have sufficient ability to engage in use, and 55% have for most practical purposes no Irish.

A brief summary of the development of language policy in regard to the educational system may help to explain why current levels of ability in the national population are not higher, and to indicate some relationships between socio-economic development and Irish language policy in this area.

Before 1922 Irish classes had been introduced into primary schools on a limited basis in response to pressure from the Gaelic League; Irish was taught, on a voluntary basis, in the majority of post-primary schools since it had been laid down as a required matriculation subject by the National University in 1913. During the 1920s the Department of Education introduced schemes to improve the competence in Irish of primary teachers, including special courses, the foundation of Irish-medium teacher-training colleges, and the establishment of Irish-medium post-primary schools to prepare pupils for entry into the training colleges. In the 1930s it tried to introduce Irish as the normal teaching medium in the three earliest primary school years, intending to extend the programme gradually to cover the whole period of primary schooling. In 1933 also Irish became a compulsory subject for all pupils in recognised post-primary schools, and a pass in Irish became required to qualify for an overall pass in state examinations. Specific grants were made to schools which taught through Irish, and extra marks awarded to candidates who took their state examinations through Irish. At the third level, one of the constituent colleges of the National University (University College, Galway) adopted a policy of providing lectures through Irish in many of its courses.

The Gaelicisation of the education system appears to have reached a peak around the late '40s. From this time on there has been a steady decline in the number of Irish-medium schools, the numbers of pupils who received their education wholly or partly through Irish, and the numbers of candidates taking their examinations through Irish. The Irish-medium programme proposed for primary schools quite early ran into trade union opposition, and over time groups of parents and other concerned parties began to suggest that it was retarding the educational advancement of the children, a suggestion apparently confirmed by some widely publicised research[23]. As the economy shifted from a rural to an industrial and service base, the proportion of each successive age cohort entering post-primary education grew rapidly, and parents became more conscious of the economic value of education for their children. Other factors also encouraged the decline – changes in the primary curriculum to put more emphasis on pupil participation, reducing the appropriateness of a non-native teaching medium[24], and the lack of adequate textbooks in Irish at the post-primary level. At the same time, there has been a decline in the use of Irish as a medium of instruction in teacher training colleges, and apparently a decline in the general competence and use of Irish amongst younger teachers, primary and post-primary.

In the CLAR national sample, more than a quarter of the respondents aged 35-44 in 1972 (whose primary education had been received in the 1940s or late '30s) had received an all-Irish primary education or one where at least some

subjects had been taught through the medium of Irish; this was true of less than 12% of those in the 17-19 age group, who would have been attending primary school during the '60s. In the school year 1973/74 the percentage of pupils outside the Gaeltacht who were attending Irish-medium schools, according to Department of Education figures, was around 0.6%.

The decrease in the proportion of the population receiving a primary education wholly or partly through Irish has been matched by a decrease in the post-primary sector, as Table 6 below shows. The CLAR Report emphasises that the major factor affecting levels of ability in Irish is the extent to which the language was used as a medium of instruction during primary and post-primary schooling – indeed, only those schools in which all communication is carried on in Irish have been at all successful in generating sufficiently high ability in sufficient numbers of their pupils to enable this to be converted into sustained usage in after life. Since such schools also play a vital part in the formation of adult networks of Irish-users, the decline in the number of pupils attending them, and in the number of schools themselves, is a very serious blow to the revival movement.

A further blow came in 1973: forty years after it was introduced, the state examination requirement of a pass in Irish was removed by the then Minister for Education, although all students at state-supported schools are

Table 6

Numbers of pupils attending all-Irish schools or having Irish as a medium of instruction for some subjects in post-primary education, 1968/69 - 1972/73

School year	All Irish	Post-primary pupils Some subjects	Total number of pupils
1968/69	4.9%	7.8%	
Number:	7,605	12,094	134,000
1969/70	4.0%	5.5%	
Number:	6,411	8,930	144,000
1970/71	3.4%	4.0%	
Number:	5,640	6,595	151,000
1971/72	2.9%	3.2%	
Number:	4,993	5,363	157,000
1972/73	2.6%	1.8%	
Number:	4,572	3,102	162,000

Source: Comhairle na Gaeilge, Report on the Irish Language in the Educational System; reproduced in CLAR Report 1976, p.147.

still required to study Irish. At the time the move was a popular one; it was seen as an attempt to free the language from the "compulsory" stigma

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which had become attached to it over the years, to improve student attitudes to it, and to free teachers from the constraints of examination preparation so that they could introduce more flexible and enjoyable courses and teaching methods. It was welcome to teachers who had increasingly resented having, as they felt, to carry the whole burden of the revival movement and the blame for its failure. At the same time students were encouraged to continue to take Irish in the Leaving Certificate examination by the promise that in certain contexts (e.g. university matriculation) an honours result in Irish would be counted as two honours.

There is some evidence to suggest that the results have not in fact been so favourable to Irish. To date, the official revision of the post-primary Irish curriculum awaited by teachers has not been forthcoming from the Department, and there is a danger that in some schools Irish classes are no longer receiving the serious treatment that other more "important" subjects obtain. The effect on state examination candidates has certainly been negative, judging by the increase in the proportion not taking Irish as a subject in the Leaving Certificate. A number of pupils have always been exempted from taking Irish[25], and in 1972 this stood at 2.5% of all candidates; by 1975 it had more than doubled to 5.4%. The change may reflect the increase in post-primary participation, particularly to Leaving Certificate level, with greater numbers of lower-ability students taking the examination for whom the additional burden of Irish is regarded as too great. But it is also likely that amongst the schools which acted most promptly to drop the serious study of Irish are schools in the higher socioeconomic brackets, which have traditionally catered to a particular status-group in the society, the business and commercial elite, and whose results in Irish in state examinations have traditionally been poor.

Any decline in the intensity with which Irish is taught in the education system must have a serious effect on ability levels and consequently on use, but this is particularly true at the Leaving Certificate level. Achieving a Leaving Certificate standard, or higher, has very significant results for individual ability in and commitment to the language[26]. Not only does it mean that the student has taken his study of the language to a fairly advanced level, but also achieving the Certificate itself appears to stand as a guarantee to individuals that they do possess high ability in Irish, something which is almost as important as ability itself in sustaining supportive attitudes towards the language in a context where opportunities for confirming this through use may be minimal. The state requirement of a pass in Irish to obtain a Leaving Certificate has had the effect of transforming the subject into a marker of academic success or failure generally; while this means that those whose educational attainments are poor may focus on the language their resentment of the system as a whole, it also means that educational success tends to foster a supportive attitude towards Irish. In this way, the recent expansion of educational opportunities in the Republic had beneficial effects for the language, as long as educational certification was closely tied to Irish requirements. But this support is unfortunately no longer available.

(iii) Education, Irish and Social Mobility

The links between Irish and educational attainments have had other interesting consequences over the recent period of economic growth. Irish requirements for educational certification and for occupational entry have generated some hostility to the language in a time when the necessity for good educational qualifications to obtain reasonable occupational status has

become widely recognised[27]. Knowledge of Irish is seen as giving an unfair advantage to some sections of the population, especially Gaeltacht children and those of urban Gaeilgeoirí[28]. Certainly ability in Irish has been a facilitator of upward social mobility throughout the period of state involvement in this aspect of the revival effort. The emphasis on Irish in teacher training colleges, Irish requirements for entry into the civil service and certain professions at a time of great expansion in the service and administrative sector of the occupational structure, and the proliferation of employment opportunities in semi-state and voluntary organisations where knowledge of Irish is required, have all helped to create a situation where ability in and support for the language is becoming increasingly associated with high social status derived from high educational and occupational attainment.

One interesting result of this is a shift in the image of Irish and of Irish users[29]: once the language of peasants – and perhaps of rural primary teachers – it is increasingly seen as part of the life-style of a particular urban occupational elite. A recent re-analysis of some of the CLAR data on support for the language amongst employed respondents (HANNAN, TOVEY, 1978) revealed that within a given social status level there are clear differences in support between different occupational groups. The highest levels of

Table 7

Percentage distribution of respondents within occupational group and status level by ethnocultural support for Irish

Social status	Occupational group	Ethnocultural support Low	Medium	High	Total Nos.
Upper middle*	(i)	18.2%	19.1	63.0	105
Lower middle*	(ii)	38.4%	17.3	44.5	52
	(iii)	29.3%	35.9	34.8	92
Lower middle*	(i)	10.4%	27.6	62.1	29
	(ii)	26.3%	24.9	48.9	217
	(iii)	25.9%	26.0	48.2	131
Manual**	(i)	8.6%	26.0	65.3	46
	(ii)	24.8%	21.0	53.8	186
	(iii)	22.4%	24.3	53.4	103
	(iv)	17.7%	17.7	64.8	74
	(v)	23.7%	28.1	48.0	181

* (i) Professional and government service employment; (ii) Commercial/industrial; (iii) Farmers.

** (i) Government service; (ii) Skilled manual; (iii) Agricultural workers; (iv) service workers; (v) semi-skilled and unskilled manual.

Source: HANNAN, TOVEY, 1978, p.20 (modified version of table).

ethnocultural support for the language (i.e. support for Irish as a symbol of national identity and cultural distinctiveness) are found amongst those employed in professional, government or semi-state occupations at any level of status, while the lowest levels are found in the commercial/industrial elite. The data refers of course only to attitudinal support, not ability or use, but it reflects closely the pattern found in the 1971 Census, where "ability to speak Irish" was reported by 80% of higher civil servants and around 50% of professionals, but only around 30% of those in commercial and industrial managerial positions (op. cit. p.13). The pattern was already visible in the returns for the 1926 Census, where between 13% and 20% of professional and government service workers said they were able to speak Irish, as compared with between 4% and 13% of those working in the various commercial and industrial occupations, but it has become much more marked over time. Clearly, educational requirements, and Irish language occupational requirements for entry into government service at all ranks, part as these were of the whole process through which a new state, politically independent but economically still dependent on its former colonial ruler, ensured the loyalty of its citizens through the dissemination of a nationalist ideology in which the language is a central symbol, have had a significant effect in promoting differential growth of language loyalty and commitment. "Professionalised occupational groups whose interests and commitments are more closely tied to the maintenance of a separate state system, and whose market competence is based on a long period of socialisation within and certification by the Irish educational system, are much more likely to emphasise the ethnocultural aspect of identity ..." (Op. cit. p.8), whereas those groups whose occupations, in a dependent economy, create linkages with significant others located outside the state system, and many of whose members may have achieved high occupational status without corresponding educational qualifications, exhibit much less attachment to ethnic ideology generally and a much weaker language loyalty. The growth in self-report as an Irish speaker in census returns which has occurred in the commercial/industrial sector in recent years appears to reflect the change in occupational recruitment into managerial positions which has followed from expansion; what was previously primarily a sponsored recruitment from within the ranks of the middle class has become a more open process of mobility from middle and larger farms and from the lower middle class, in which educational qualifications play a more significant part.

Thus the links betwen the Irish language, educational certification and entry into certain occupations, along with the socialisation experiences, choice of reference groups, and reference status systems which appear to accompany these links, have led to the current situation of a strong association between language loyalty and relatively high social prestige, particularly amongst those employed in professional or government service. The concentration of such occupational groups in urban areas, and the fact that education in rural areas has generally acted as a vehicle of geographical mobility into the centre as well as social mobility, appears to be causing a shift in the regional source of support for the language. Language revivalists are beginning to say that while the Gaeltacht is still important, it may be what happens in Dublin over the next decade which will be the deciding factor for the fate of the language.

In Dublin indeed some encouraging trends are already becoming apparent - particularly the striking growth in recent years of Irish-medium primary

schools[30]. The initiative in promoting such schools has apparently moved from the Department of Education to local groups of parents, who have in some cases had to bring considerable pressure to bear before the Department would recognise the school. Recent research on families attending twelve of these schools[31] indicates a trend for them to be set up in the more recently established and relatively high status housing areas, and to have amongst the parents supporting them a preponderence of civil service, semi-state and professional workers, high levels of education, and higher than average ability in Irish. But there is considerable variation in the reasons why parents support such schools: many appear less concerned about the language than about the good educational reputation, better teacher-pupil ratios, less authoritarian classroom atmosphere and so on, that they believe characterise these schools. Irish-medium schools are apparently seen by parents as providing an alternative to the state primary system[32], and the type of support which such a school will obtain depends, therefore, to some extent on the catchment area within which it is located; where other alternatives (other private schools) are also available, only the more committed parents are likely to choose the Irish-medium school, but where it is the only alternative, less committed parents may choose it for that reason. The fact that these schools are apparently attracting support from those who are relatively indifferent to the language is particularly encouraging, since sending a child to an Irish-medium school apparently results in a significant increase in the home use of Irish, not only by that child but also between parents and children, and between the parents themselves, while involvement with the school fosters contacts with other potential Irish users and increases opportunities for use outside the home.

Whether this development could ever counteract the effects of an apparent gradual withdrawal of the state education system from the promotion of Irish is unlikely, however. The testing point may come at the post-primary level: some groups who have successfully established Irish-medium primary schools are now seeking to establish similar post-primary schools for their children to move on to, and although the results of these efforts will have to be carefully monitored, it does not seem at present that the support for such schools would be nearly so strong as it has been for primary schools[33].

5. A FINAL COMMENT

If the revival movement is shifting once again to dependence on the support, commitment and initiative of local or special interest groups, how does the situation differ now from that which obtained when the Gaelic League was formed, towards the end of the last century, and is there any likelihood that such methods will bring greater success now than they did then? In many respects the situation has improved: state intervention has led to a substantial increase in ability in the national population, with a corresponding rise in attitudinal support; the language is established as a symbol of national identity; support for it is strongest amongst those groups which are best placed to organise effectively and to influence government policy on its behalf. There are far greater financial resources and resources of knowledge about and expertise in language promotion available now to interested groups than there were a century or even twenty years ago. On the other side, there is the continuing decline in the use of the language, most crucially within

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the Gaeltacht but evident also in the national population. And of course the nationalist mobilisation of the population which was so crucial a resource to the Gaelic League is less available to revivalists today. While much of the support for the language in the general population does stem from its acceptance of nationalist ideology, the force of this ideology in mobilising behaviour is very much weaker within an independent nation-state than it was in a colonised nation seeking independence. A change in the symbolic system of national identity (if Irish was replaced, for example, by a variant of English), or a decline in intensity of concern over national identity (as might follow from, for example, a re-identification along regional lines relative to the EEC), particularly if abilities in Irish start again to decline and the public visibility of the language continues to diminish, could make it impossible to sustain public commitment to the revival ideal.

One outcome of some of the trends I have discussed here may be an increasing polarisation of attitudes towards the language, coinciding with differences in occupational and educational status and socialisation experience. In this situation revivalists may find it necessary to abandon the essentially consensus-based ideal of community language growth, and try to develop other strategies which would exploit the support which exists in particular groups, networks or sectors in the society. It seems certain that planning for and research into the situation of Irish will be a profitable occupation for experts for some time to come; but it will not be very easy for them to decide whether the reason for their presence is a christening or a funeral.

NOTES

1: It is regrettable that the data available on the current situation of Irish refers only to the Republic (26 counties), as a comparison with the situation in the North of Ireland, where there is no state support for the language, would be very interesting. Impressions suggest a revival of interest in Irish in the North, particularly in the urban centre of Belfast, but population censuses there do not include questions on the language, and there have been, as far as I know, no major studies carried out there as there have in the Republic. This paper will, therefore, confine its discussion to data on and developments in the Republic.

In the Republic there is abundant data available, both from the Census and from independent studies. In most cases, however, it is six or more years old. The last population census in the Republic was taken in 1971 – that due in 1976 was "postponed" for administrative and economic reasons. The data collected by the Committee on Language Attitudes Research, which was the first major national study of the situation of Irish, dates from 1972-1973. Apart from this, there are a few more recent studies: one is an on-going study of the effect on family and community use of Irish of the attendance of children at all-Irish primary schools in Dublin (see note 31), and is based on data collected in early 1977. There is also a market research study of attitudes to Irish, which was commissioned by the state broadcasting authority and carried out in early 1978, which replicated some of the items from the main CLAR study six years earlier. It suggests that on most of these items at least there has been little change during the period.

This paper draws extensively on the data and analysis of the Committee on Language Research team, and I would like to acknowledge my indebtedness to them for the use of their material and many of their ideas.

2: See HUTCHINSON, B.: 1969.

3: See JACKSON, J. A.: 1978

4: We might mention, briefly, the decay of the literary forms of the language and its transformation into a folk medium based on a number of regional dialectical variants, after the final defeat of the native Gaelic aristocracy at the end of the 16th century; the successive "plantations" of English-speakers from outside the country onto lands previously held by native Irish speakers; the heavy emigration, from the mid-19th century on, particularly of the children and siblings of small farmers from the poorer parts of country, many of them natively Irish-speaking; and from the same period, the introduction of an English-medium state primary education system which was hostile to the Irish language.

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5: See CLAR Report, Ch. III, "Attitudes".

6: At different periods, different verbal forms were used for the question on Irish, and there is some doubt over how it was actually interpreted – i.e. in terms of ability in or use of the language – by those making the returns. In general, particularly in the later censuses, the returns appear to represent self-assessment of ability rather than of use.

7: See DEVLIN, B.: 1972

8: And to recognise the existence of the Meath Gaeltacht, which was given official status later than the others.

9: Those who emigrated included both the least educated and, partly at least as a result of Government policies on the language outside the Gaeltacht, those with the highest education levels.

10: See BRODY, H.: 1973

11: See GARVIN, T.: 1977. The ideal of self-sufficiency for economic independence which dominated government policy under de Valera during the 1930s and 40s could be seen as a transference of the ideal of a subsistence farming way of life to the nation as a whole.

12: This has also been called a "reservation mentality" on the Gaeltacht – keeping the Gaeltacht way of life unchanged so that the rest of the country, while enjoying the benefits of urbanisation and advanced technology, could look at the Gaeltacht to reassure itself that its traditional identity was being maintained.

13: For example, grants were paid to families which could prove that they were rearing their children through Irish; money made available to householders who wanted to improve their facilities so that they could offer accommodation to tourists or to the "scoláirí" (schoolchildren and university students) who came on courses to the Gaeltacht to improve their Irish; aid given to local groups to build community centres etc.

14: Committee on Language Attitudes Research.

15: Data was collected from respondents on four general contexts of use: current home, personal and informal transactions (e.g. with shopkeepers, in farm work, in the pub), symbolic speech events and participants (religious and political events, public meetings), and formal or non-local transactions and participants (e.g. doctors or agricultural advisors, in factories or in the police station). Individual responses were transformed into community scores on the basis of the proportion of respondents within each DED who said that Irish was used "always" or "often" in these contexts. The measure of community potential was established in a similar way by combining respondents' self-assessment of their speaking ability with responses to the question whether Irish could be used in the community in all contexts, if anyone so desired.

16: See Ó TUAMA, S. (Ed.): 1972, p.106.

17: Obviously there are good political reasons for this lack of clarity.

18: For example, the experiment with primary schools during the 1930s, and the establishment of a small number of Irish-using sections in the Civil Service, neither of which has had much lasting success.

19: If the belief seems naive, with hindsight, we should remember that research into the linguistic situation in Ireland, and knowledge about comparative situations elsewhere which might have helped to guide Irish language planners, is quite a new phenomenon on the Irish scene.

20: For example, standardisation of the language to overcome barriers of regional dialectical variation, the provision of dictionaries, the publication of books and magazines in Irish, the provision of facilities such as club premises for voluntary organisations, and of Irish classes for adults, and pre-school play-groups in Irish for young children, the establishment of competitions between local groups over language promotion in their areas etc.

21: See CLAR Report, 1976: p. 157

22: See CLAR Report, 1976: Appendix 4, Table 5, p. 410

23: MACNAMARA, J.: 1966

24: See Ó DOMHNALLÁIN, T.: 1977

25: For example, those whose early education was received outside the state.

26: See CLAR Report, 1976, Ch. III, "Ability", pp. 140-142

27: Attitudes to Irish as a school subject are generally unfavourable in the national population, although support for the language generally appears to improve after leaving school, when its meaning is gradually redefined in broader ethnic or nationalistic, rather than educational, terms.

28: A slightly derogatory term for non-native speaking language activists.

29: See CLAR Report, 1976: Ch. 5, pp. 300-301 on the Matched Guise Test.

30: Eight of the 14 all-Irish primary schools in the greater Dublin area have been founded since 1969, two of them within the last year.

31: Under the auspices of the Institiúid Teangeolaíochta Éireann (Linguistics Institute of Ireland).

32: In the Republic this is administered through parishes, the school manager being the priest or clergyman in charge of the parish; in some urban areas class sizes in these schools are unacceptably large to parents concerned about their children's educational future.

33: There appear to be fairly widespread beliefs that the amount of Irish received in the primary years is enough to give a lasting grasp of the language, and that in any case post-primary education is too important to a child's economic future to allow any experimentation with it.

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